

Orthodox fundamentalism threatens Russian Patriarchate and Kremlin

– Eurasia Daily Monitor (14.07.2020) – Radical Russian Orthodox fundamentalist Shiigumen Sergey, who controls a monastery in the Urals and has attracted a wide following across Russia, has demanded that Patriarch Kirill and President Vladimir Putin both leave their posts and hand their powers over to him (Ahilla.ru, July 13). That bold ultimatum, in its sheer outrageousness, spotlights an issue that has attracted remarkably little attention until now: Christian Orthodox fundamentalism and the threat it poses to the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) as well as to the Kremlin. The danger comes not from the possibility that either Russian leader is about to accede to this wild insistence but because it shows that there are a growing number of Russian Orthodox hierarchs and laity who reject the slavish obedience of the Patriarchate to the state. And despite their often-reactionary views, these people are exploiting the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic to spread such ideology far more effectively than their opponents. As a result, it is becoming ever more difficult for the Kremlin to continue to rely on the ROC as a major ideological weapon both at home and abroad.

As in past cases, both the Patriarchate and the Kremlin have adopted a whack-a-mole approach, disciplining the priest involved first via church law and then by applying civil law, rather than addressing the larger problems the Urals region abbot represents. The key precedent for Moscow's response to

Shiigumen Sergey was its earlier response to another Orthodox fundamentalist, Bishop Diomid of Anadyr and Chukotka, a decade ago (Nr2.ru, Windowoneurasia.blogspot.com, June 30, 2008). Such a strategy may remove from the scene the individuals involved, but they do little to solve problems and may, in fact, make them worse for both the Church and the state.

Many analysts in Russia and the West are accustomed to speaking about fundamentalism in Islam, but fundamentalism exists in every religion, arising as it does out of a sense among some of its followers that they must turn away from leaders who have violated the basic provisions of the faith and go back to first principles. Now, in Russia at least, analysts are beginning to focus not just on how Orthodox fundamentalism is challenging the Church hierarchy but also how they are affecting relations between the ROC and the Russian state and demanding a voice in the formulation of state policy.

The fundamentalists' challenge to the ROC is more immediate. But their challenge, both direct and indirect, to the Kremlin is likely to be more fateful.

The coronavirus pandemic has brought both challenges to the fore. Patriarch Kirill, afraid of the growing power of the fundamentalists, deferred to his bishops, many of whom have fundamentalist views themselves, on the question of whether churches would be closed or not. In Moscow, he closed them, but elsewhere each local bishop made his own decision. Both Kirill's obvious fear of this decentralizing trend within the Church and the new ability of the bishops to act more independently are making the fundamentalists the most important threat to the patriarch and a unified Russian

Orthodox Church. Some are now even talking about splits, regional autocephaly or a Russian reformation, Sergey Chaplin, a close observer of the Orthodox Church, says (Carnegie.ru, June 29).

Yet, the fundamentalists have not limited their challenges to the religious sphere. They are now presenting demands to the Kremlin as well, putting forward ideas very much at odds with those of Kirill. One of the most prominent lay Orthodox fundamentalists is Konstantin Malofeyev, a prominent businessman who owns the nationalist Tsargradtelevision network (see Hot Issue, August 8, 2014). He has assembled around himself people like Nikita Mikhalkov and Sergey Glazyev, and they regularly push their views on political issues via Deputy Prime Minister Andrey Belousov, apparently an ally within the regime (Ura.news, July 8).

Encouraged by that, the group has taken the next step and presented to the Kremlin a 500-page program on how to change Russia's course and promote development by means of blocking the export of capital, lowering interest rates, and promoting genuine protectionism so as to allow for the re-industrialization of the country, thereby reversing the direction set by more liberal figures like German Gref, Anatoly Chubais and Aleksei Kudrin. In many ways, Malofeyev is preaching to the choir. In particular, the "Orthodox oligarch" has suggested that, although Putin will likely remain after 2024, "anything can happen"; and if the Kremlin leader does go, the liberals will stage a comeback because there are so many of them in office—and only one in prison, where, he contends, they all belong. At the same time, however, Malofeyev highlights a problem that Putin has, so far, been unwilling to address (Ura.news, July 8).

The system of church administration Patriarch Kirill created is collapsing, in part because of the coronavirus but more importantly because of the increasing power of Orthodox fundamentalists across the country. “Orthodox fundamentalism [...] has again appeared in the last five years,” Chaplin observed in May (Rosbalt, May 1). It now exists “throughout Russia,” and the health crisis is giving its adherents the chance to spread their views more publicly as they are actively using social networks and working with multimedia content far more often and effectively than do representatives of the established Church. Consequently, Putin cannot count on the Patriarchate to serve the Kremlin, either as an ideological arm within the Russian Federation or as an aid to his expansive ideas about the “Russian World” abroad (Politeia.ru, February 2020; Postimees.ee, July 8).

The Kremlin leader now faces a difficult choice between continuing to rely on an increasingly ineffective Patriarchate, trying to revive it with someone like his favorite Metropolitan Tikhon of Pskov (Gorod 812, May 8), or rebuilding the ROC around the fundamentalists whose very enthusiasm would constitute both an opportunity and a threat. But either of these options could lead to schism—the very thing Putin most wants to avoid.

UKRAINE: Autocephaly: Balm or

bomb for Ukraine's Orthodox?

By Geraldine Fagan

East-West Church Report (vol. 26, no. 4, 2018) – They're singing the Lord's Prayer, you might take off your hat!" Hearing the elderly woman's reproach, a man of similar age meekly slides his cap down to his chest. The pair stand near the editor of the East-West Church Report amid a 5,000-strong crowd facing the iconic St. Sophia's Cathedral, built a thousand years ago by the first Christian rulers of Kyiv. The occasion is a government-sponsored Prayer for Ukraine on the morning of 14 October. This is both the Eastern Christian feast day of the Intercession of the Mother of God and—as of 2015—Defender of Ukraine Day, a public holiday honoring the armed forces.

A day prior, some news reports claimed that local bureaucrats had pressured people into attending the event.[1] Yet perhaps a third present spontaneously cross themselves and join in prayers. Many more sing the unofficial national anthem, "O Lord, Almighty and Only" [Ukrainian: "Bozhe Velykyi, Edynyi"] and respond to the customary western Ukrainian greeting, "Glory to Jesus Christ!" [Ukrainian: "Slava Iisusu Khristu!"].

These official prayers are in thanksgiving for a decision to grant autocephaly—or full independence—to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, affirmed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople on 11 October. The move has implications for the development of all Christianity in Ukraine, as witnessed at the event by speakers from the country's Greek and Roman Catholic Churches, and Bible Society.[2]

Rivals for legitimacy

Ukrainian Orthodoxy is unusually factious. Inside the country, the post-Soviet period has seen the emergence of three major contenders to the status of canonical— or legitimate— Ukrainian Orthodox Church, one under the Patriarchate of Moscow and two breakaway entities. Until now, only the first of these has been acknowledged by the wider Orthodox world. (In diaspora, two further Ukrainian Orthodox structures formally under the Patriarchate of Constantinople are headquartered in Canada and the United States.)

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) retains the largest number of registered parishes in Ukraine, with approximately 12,000 (Russia has approximately 17,000). Its main rival, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyiv Patriarchate), has approximately 5,000. A third body, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), has some 1,000 parishes, concentrated in three far western regions of Ukraine that lay outside the Soviet Union before World War II.[3]

This ratio did not shift dramatically for 20 years. But since 2014—when clashes with pro-Kremlin forces erupted in eastern Ukraine—public allegiance to the Moscow and Kyiv Patriarchates has see-sawed. Respectively 35 and 22 percent in 2010, it is now 19 and 43 percent.[4]

National security concern

The Kyiv Patriarchate's anti-Kremlin stance is a key factor.

During the 2013-14 demonstrations centered upon Kyiv's Maidan Square which ultimately toppled the pro-Kremlin regime of Viktor Yanukovich, the Kyiv Patriarchate's nearby St. Michael's Monastery provided refuge to those fleeing police batons. Today, the monastery's perimeter forms a Memory Wall displaying the names and photographs of 3,367 Ukrainian combatants killed in the Donbass conflict during 2014-17.

Ukrainian Autocephaly

Addressing the 14 October crowd and television audience, Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko thus characterized autocephaly as a question of national security. Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, he explained, prays for the Russian authorities "who have committed aggression against our country." [5] The Orthodox leader conspicuously absent from the podium was Onufry, the Moscow Patriarchate's Metropolitan of Kyiv. 14 October is also a special feast day for the nearby Intercession Convent, and he leads worship there for approximately 1,000 faithful. Most senior Moscow Patriarchate clerics in Ukraine, including Onufry, oppose the autocephaly project. [6]

For them, the ambitious figure of Patriarch Filaret, head of the Kyiv Patriarchate, is a particular obstacle. [7] Nearly 90, Filaret was staunchly pro-Kremlin when a predecessor to Metropolitan Onufry. As late as 1990 he expressed alarm that the growth of "the so-called Ukrainian autocephalous church" might contribute to the independence of Ukraine from the Soviet Union. Such a separation from Moscow, he maintained at that time, "fundamentally contradicts our thousand-year tradition in which the Russian Church has always been the source of unity." [8]

After failing to be elected Moscow Patriarch that same year, Filaret reversed his position on Ukrainian autocephaly and state independence in 1991. Today, notwithstanding Kyiv's ongoing efforts at de-Communization, he still vigorously defends his and other Soviet-era bishops' collaboration with the KGB.[9]

Given Moscow's aversion to full independence for the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, President Poroshenko made overtures to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople— the senior Patriarchate in the Orthodox world. Following the president's April 2018 meeting with Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, the Ukrainian parliament voted to support an appeal for autocephaly on the part of the state. In late August Patriarch Bartholomew hosted Patriarch Kirill of Moscow at his Istanbul headquarters. According to an alleged transcript of the meeting, Kirill disputed that Poroshenko and the Ukrainian parliament were legitimate representatives of the Ukrainian people, having “seized power as a result of a coup d'état during the Maidan uprising.”[10]

A week later, Constantinople dispatched two exarchs— bishops of its Ukrainian diaspora structures—to Kyiv as its representatives “within the framework of the preparations for the granting of autocephaly.”[11] The Russian Orthodox Church responded by suspending senior-level relations with Constantinople.[12]

On 11 October Constantinople went further, lifting Moscow's disciplinary measures against the heads of the two breakaway Ukrainian Orthodox entities, Filaret and Makary; restoring

their faithful to Orthodox communion; and rescinding Moscow's authority to ordain the Metropolitan of Kyiv, granted in 1686.[13] Roundly rejecting these rulings, Moscow broke off all relations with Constantinople on 15 October.[14]

Unification council

A unification council tasked with forming the new Orthodox Church of Ukraine met at St. Sophia's Cathedral in Kyiv on 15 December. It elected a senior Kyiv Patriarchate hierarch, Epifany (Dumenko), as the entity's Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine, beating Metropolitan Simeon of Vinnytsia of the Moscow Patriarchate by eight votes. Out of 10 Moscow Patriarchate hierarchs reportedly among the 64 who voted, two participated publicly. Their synod took disciplinary action against them on 17 December.[15]

The situation is murky and volatile. Some Ukrainian Orthodox under Moscow fear the creation of the new church will lead to violent property seizures. While the Ukrainian government rejects this suggestion, it may prove powerless to curb ultranationalist groups hostile to any perceived Russian influence.

Such a possibility was also plain on the afternoon of 14 October, when over 8,000 Ukrainian nationalists—some bearing Nazi insignia—took to the streets elsewhere in Kyiv. Although marginal, these elements could swiftly mobilize against Orthodox remaining under Moscow. As one youth engaged in such harassment in the far western region of Ivano Frankivsk explained in a 4 November BBC documentary, “These people don't

love Ukraine. They is Russia [sic].”[16]

Yet the situation is also less binary than may appear. The wife of a Ukrainian-speaking Moscow Patriarchate priest whose Ivano-Frankivsk village church was seized by nationalists also told the BBC that her son had fought against Russian-backed rebels in the eastern Donbass region: “What kind of enemy are we?”

Local opinion overlooked

Such nuanced local opinion within Metropolitan Onufry’s church lies unnoticed beneath the Moscow-Constantinople polemic. Particularly overlooked is patriotic defense of Ukraine combined with loyalty to the Moscow Patriarchate, still understood by many as the only canonical Orthodox option. Indeed, such sentiments are mainstream: Onufry himself may not have been at the 14 October event, but Metropolitan Avgustin of Bila Tserkva and Bohuslav—his church’s representative to Ukraine’s armed forces—read out a statement praising the Ukrainian military’s committed defense of the Motherland. He was warmly applauded.

Over the following pages, the East-West Church Report presents diverging views—for and against autocephaly—held by two hierarchs of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). Both are auxiliary bishops of Kyiv, were born and raised in Ukraine, and are in their 40s. (The pro-autocephaly hierarch is one of those now facing disciplinary measures for participating in the 15 December unification council.) In forthcoming issues, the East-West Church Report

will feature less prominent Orthodox voices in Ukraine, as well as a range of other local views on the situation for Christians in the country, including with respect to religious freedom and the Donbass conflict.

[1] For example, [in Russian] <https://123ru.net/kiiev/169810378>

[2] [In Ukrainian] https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=61&v=bo_7FE9a-QQ

[3] The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) is officially called the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. "(Moscow Patriarchate)" is added here for clarity. [In Russian] <https://religsvoboda.ru/content/religioznayastatistika-na-1-aprelya-2018-goda>; [In Ukrainian] http://mincult.kmu.gov.ua/document/245234300/Form1_MCU_Nakaz260-29032017.xls.

[4] [In Ukrainian] Biblioteka Tsentru Razumkova, *Osoblyvosti Religiïnoho i Tserkovno-Religiïnoho Samovyznachennia Ukraïns'kikh Gromadian: Tendentsii 2010-2018 rr.*, Kyiv, 2018, 17.

[5] [In Ukrainian] "Vystup Prezidenta Ukraïny pid chas uchasti u molytovnomu zakhodi za Ukraïnu," 14 October 2018; <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/vistup-prezidenta-ukrayini-pidchas-uchasti-u-molitovnomu-za-50446>.

[6] [In Russian] <http://news.church.ua/2018/11/13/postanovlenie-sobora-episkopov-ukrainskoj-pravoslavnoj-cerkviot-13-noyabrya-2018-goda/?lang=ru>

[7] [In Russian] "Mitropolit Cherkasskii Sofronii: UPTs MP dolzhna uchastvovat' v ob''edinitel'nom sobore," Akhilla, 26 October 2018, <https://ahilla.ru/mitropolit-cherkasskij-sofronij-upts-mpdolzh>

na-uchastvovat-v-obedinitelnom-sobore/

[8] Russian State Archive of Social and Political History, Fond 89, Opis 8, Delo 41.

[9] "A Conversation with Patriarch Filaret," Atlantic Council, 19 September 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29J7coFpcqs>; [In Ukrainian] "Kisel'ov. Avtors'ke. Gist' patriarkha Filaret," Telekanal Priamii, 31 December 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVsbQbUNWYE>

[10] [In Russian] "Ekskliuziv: Dialog Varfolomeia – Kirilla po ukrainskomu voprosu," Orthodoxy Info, 28 September 2018, <https://orthodoxia.info/news/экссклюзив-диалог-варфоломеякирилла/>

[11] [In Greek] <https://www.ec-patr.org/docdisplay.php?lang=gr&id=2563&tla=gr>

[12] "Statement of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church concerning the uncanonical intervention of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church," 14 September 2018, <https://mospat.ru/en/2018/09/14/news163803/>

[13] "Announcement of the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople," https://www.uocofusa.org/news_181013_1.html

[14] [In Russian] "Zaiavlenie Sviashchennogo Sinoda Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi v sviazi s posiatel'stvom Konstantinopol'skogo Patriarkhata na kanonicheskuiu territoriiu Russkoi Tserkvi," 15 October 2018, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5283708.html>

[15] [In Russian] "Stalo izvestno, kak budut vybirat' Predstoiatelia novoi Tserkvi," RISU, 15 December 2018, https://risu.org.ua/ru/index/all_news/orthodox/orthodox_world/73913/; "Stalo izvestno, skol'ko golosov na vyborakh poluchil

Predstoiatel' Epifanii," RISU, 17 December 2018, https://risu.org.ua/ru/index/all_news/orthodox/ocu/73933/;
"Sinod UPTs (MP) nazval ob''edinitel'nyi Sobor 'raskol'nicheskim' i zapretil v sluzhenii mitropolitov Simeona i Aleksandra," RISU, 17 December 2018, https://risu.org.ua/ru/index/all_news/orthodox/uoc/73950/

[16] "Ukraine's Church – Rejecting Russia," BBC News Channel, 4 November 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b0brfr0m/our-world-ukraines-church-rejecting-russia#>

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GREECE: Church agreement to

take 10,000 priests off payroll

BBC (07.11.2018) – <https://bbc.in/2PlW2EE> – A landmark agreement has been reached in Athens that will end the status of priests and bishops as civil servants and bring Greece a step closer to separation of Church and state.

Some 10,000 Church employees will come off the payroll, although their wages will still be paid as a state subsidy.

The Orthodox Church plays a significant role in public life in Greece.

Some priests and politicians criticised the deal between Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and Archbishop Ieronimos.

What have they agreed?

The two leaders say the state will continue to pay the clergy's salaries but no longer as civil servants. Greece has been trying to scale back its public sector after years of international bailouts. In 2015, 18% of the workforce was employed by the government.

Payment will be made through an annual subsidy of around €200m (£175m; \$230m), and that fund will not be affected if the Church increases or reduces the number of priests.

In return, the Church will not oppose moves to make the state “religion neutral” and would drop any claim to property once taken over by the state.

This property dispute dates back to 1952, and in their agreement the two sides said they would set up a joint fund to manage and develop sites claimed by both Church and state. Revenues and bills would be split 50-50.

Will anything change in Greece?

By Kostas Kallergis, BBC News

The deal between the prime minister and archbishop is definitely an important step towards Greece becoming a genuinely secular country, but the Greek Orthodox Church will remain omnipresent in numerous aspects of the Greek state.

Pupils at Greek schools still start their day with a prayer and continue to be taught religion throughout their 12-year mandatory education.

Greek courts have a religious icon hanging above the judge’s seat and some public services still have forms which require to know the citizens’ religion, despite this being theoretically illegal.

Even at the top political level, every new Greek government, including the last two headed by left-wing Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras, have invited the country's top clergy to sanctify them during the cabinet's swearing-in ceremony.

And despite the archbishop's concessions on constitutional reform, the preamble to the Greek constitution will continue to read "In the name of the Holy and Con-substantial and Indivisible Trinity" – a reference to the fact Greece is not simply Christian, but Christian Orthodox.

This deal is a first step, but there is clearly a very long way ahead before Church and state in Greece are completely separate.

What is the reaction to the agreement?

It will have to be approved by Church leaders as well as the government and MPs.

Not everyone is happy. A former education minister in the prime minister's party complained that the salaries of 10,000 priests were being guaranteed when the number of hospital doctors during the bailout years was even smaller.

The association of Greek clerics complained that losing the status of civil servants could deny them existing rights and said priests felt betrayed that they had not been consulted about the deal.

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